

Archives Advice No. 4

What have Records got to do with me?

Considerations for Government Officials and Employees

Why are records important?

Government officials interact with records every hour of the workday. Each time an email is written, a letter sent, or a purchase made, a record is created. But why are they important? Records tell us what, where, and when something was done or why a decision was made. They also tell us who was involved and under what authority. In other words, records provide evidence of government and individual activity.

Records are invaluable to you in many ways:

- They help you to do your work more efficiently;
- They enable you to meet legal obligations applicable to your work;
- They protect the interests of the government and your agency; and,
- They protect your rights as an employee and as a citizen.

Records are an important element of accountable government. Lax record keeping practices in government contribute to inefficiencies and poor decision-making.

Who is responsible?

Making and keeping your agency's records depends on the cooperation of everyone in your agency. While your agency's director and records management program (or records officer) are responsible for meeting the requirements of the Georgia Records Act, effective record keeping ultimately depends on you.

What the Georgia Records Act says:

- O.C.G.A. §50-18-94, It shall be the duty of each agency to:
 1. Cause to be made and preserved records containing adequate and proper documentation of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions of the agency and designed to furnish the information necessary to protect the legal and financial rights of the government and of persons directly affected by the agency's activities;
 2. Cooperate fully with the department (State Archives) in complying with this article;
 3. Establish and maintain an active and continuing program for the economical and efficient management of records and assist the department in the conduct of records management surveys;
 4. Implement records management procedures and regulations issued by the department;
 5. Submit to the department, in accordance with the rules and regulations of the department, a recommended retention schedule for each records series in its custody, . . .
 6. Establish necessary safeguards against the removal or loss of records and such further safeguards as may be required by regulations of the department. The safeguards shall include notification to all



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official and employees of the agency that no records in the custody of the agency are to be alienated or destroyed except in accordance with this article;

7. Designate an agency records management officer who shall operate a records management program.

What are your responsibilities?

Simply stated, you have a number of basic obligations.

1. Create records routinely as part of your work. Records may naturally arise in the course of your work, such as sending an email. In other cases, where the activity does not automatically result in the creation of a record, you may need to create one to document what happened and why. Examples of these activities include meetings, telephone conversations, informal discussions, and the receipt of funds.
2. File records into official records systems. Your agency has official systems for managing its records, whether those records are created and received in paper or electronic form. Failing to capture records into official records systems makes them difficult or impossible to locate when they are needed. They may even end up lost or destroyed. Do not hoard records in your own private store outside your agency's official records. This applies to emails, too. Emails that you send or receive in the course of your employment are official records. If an email needs to be kept to document a transaction or decision, then it should be captured into your agency's official records system.
3. Handle records with care. For paper records to survive and be available for as long as they are needed, they must be properly cared for. Avoid storing records near known hazards and try not to damage them. Records are a corporate asset of your agency and do not belong to you. Do not remove them from official records systems for extended periods of time or take them out of your agency. It is important that they remain available to other staff that needs them.
4. Do not destroy records without authority. Your agency's records, whether in paper or electronic form, cannot generally be destroyed without proper authority from your agency records officer. Some kinds of records have only transitory value and can be destroyed when you no longer need them, as a "normal administrative practice." Make sure you know which kinds of records you deal with have long-term and permanent value to your agency or your own work and which are transitory. Your agency's records officer can provide guidance (the Georgia Archives can tell you who your agency's records officer is). Failing to maintain records for the length of time they are needed puts you and your agency at risk of being unable to account for what has happened or has been decided. This results in problems for your agency's clients, monetary losses from penalties or litigation, embarrassment for your agency or the government, or even disciplinary action for you or your colleagues.
5. Protect sensitive records from unauthorized access. Records can contain personal and confidential information, which must not be disclosed to unauthorized persons. Ensure that records storage areas are kept secure, protect passwords to your agency's networked resources and data stores and do not leave sensitive records lying around.
6. Find out about your agency's policies and procedures for managing records. Every agency is required by law to establish policies and procedures for the management of their records in all forms. You can help support good record keeping in your agency by finding out what they say and how you can better create and manage records in your daily work.

If you need further assistance, please call the Georgia Archives at (678) 364-3790.